

Christ Our Peace: Violence, Shame, and Glory in Early Christian Reception of Ephesians 2:11-22

ABSTRACT: This article is an interdisciplinary exploration of early Christian interpretations of Eph. 2:11-22, aimed at applying early Christian reflections on violence and peace to the practical concerns of the 21st century. First, it examines recurring themes in early Christian reception of Eph. 2:11-22, which include combatting gnosticism, cosmic reconciliation, the royal glory and honor of Christ, and the diversity of the church. The early Christian connection between glory, peace, Christology, and social realities is read alongside research in sociology and psychology, pointing to the key role that shame plays in cycles of violence—both against oneself and others, and both on the individual and group levels. Finally, the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and trends in U.S. culture are looked at in light of these insights, and reflections are made on how all of this can practically equip any Christian for the work of building peace in divided times.

KEYWORDS: Glory, Christology, Peace, Peacemaking, honor, shame, American culture, evangelicalism, far-right, January 6th, gospel of peace, gnosticism, reconciliation, diversity, Trump

Kristin Caynor, PhD student at Trinity College Bristol/University of Aberdeen. She earned a B.A. in Bible and Theology from Simpson University, Redding, CA and an M.T.S. from Duke University Divinity School.

Caynor, Kristin. "Christ Our Peace: Violence, Shame, and Glory in Early Christian Reception of Ephesians 2:11-22." *Journal for the Study of Bible and Violence* 1 (2022):65-94.

Copyright © 2022 The Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, Bristol Baptist College, UK

Introduction

This study was conducted as part of *The Ephesians 2 Gospel Project*, a project of Mission One which exists to create a global conversation among Christians to help us each to address conflict, violence, oppression and shame-fuelled crises in our communities. It began with the troubling question, “How is it that predominantly Christian nations can perpetrate widespread violence on the basis of group identity, while accepting passages like Ephesians 2:11–22 as authoritative Scripture? While our project is global in scope, we have focused on the examples of slavery in the United States, Nazism in Germany and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

The global discussion we have initiated seeks the contributions of people not only across contemporary contexts, but also across time. This article focuses on early Christian reception of Ephesians 2, and fuses insights from their interpretation with contemporary research in social sciences to equip people today in the task of peacemaking. I will first give a brief overview of early Christian interpretive practices, before zooming in on the reception of Ephesians 2:11–22 until the 400s AD. I will identify the recurring themes of combating Gnosticism, cosmic reconciliation and the royal glory and honour of Christ, and will show how Christology connects these themes to social realities embedded in "Christ our Peace".

For many of the early fathers, there is no true peace unless it is total, and the extent of the peace that Jesus is able to attain for us is predicated on who he is. Only a human being could heal humanity and all living things; only the King of Israel could unite diverse peoples and bring them to peace; and only God could defeat the Powers of the Air which cause oppression and violence. In the early Christian writings against Gnosticism, we see that it is critical that Jesus be both truly God and truly human because the restoration of the cosmos depends on it.

I will argue that central to all of this is the undoing of shame – the unmet desires of humanity for worth, significance, recognition and belonging – which both emerge from violence and lead to violence. Contemporary research in psychology and sociology has begun to show a deep connection between our yearnings for belonging and glory, and violence of all kinds. This is part of what

I believe the early Christians and the book of Ephesians itself is getting at. Unless God associates himself with every dimension of existence, it is not possible for him to restore his glory in the cosmos and truly conquer sin and death.

I also found that the church fathers were just as concerned for what some of them called "impiety" in relation to Ephesians 2:11–22 as they were with heresy. For many of them, the only thing worse than believing the wrong thing was believing the right thing and then failing to honour it through our lived social realities. Living in discord dishonours God and degrades the glory he shares with us. So while the early Christians were deeply concerned that we realise our true glory and find our true belonging, they were also concerned that we feel a sense of shame when we fail to do that in accordance with the truth.

Before we dive in further, I will set the stage with a brief overview of early Christian interpretive practices so that we can do justice to these important texts.

Overview of Early Christian Interpretation: Christological and Practical

Origen of Alexandria (c. 184 – c. 253 AD) was arguably the most influential exegete of the early church, and his basic structure for interpretation (or versions of it) dominated Christian reading until the Reformation. He taught that each passage of Scripture can be interpreted according to three senses, which correspond to the three parts of the human being. The *somatic* or "bodily" sense is something like the "literal", historical-grammatical sense of the text. The *psychic* or "soul" sense connects with issues of morality and the Christian path. It gives instruction for *how* the believer draws spiritually closer to God. Finally, the *pneumatic* or "spiritual" sense speaks to cosmic and eschatological matters.

In order to arrive at the psychic and pneumatic senses, many interpreters read allegorically. So, for instance, in Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs, he says that in the somatic sense this is a book about married love, in

the psychic sense it is about the individual's relationship with Christ as the lover of their soul, and in the pneumatic sense it is about Christ and the church.¹

Why was this? According to 1 Timothy 3:16, *all* Scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. The early church took this seriously, and yet many passages were difficult to read in a way that seemed morally and spiritually profitable. Early Christians believed that while not every passage of Scripture has a clear or useful somatic sense, every passage has psychic and pneumatic senses arising from the person of Christ, who is present in all Scripture.

In other words, all Scripture is both Christological *and* practical and the two flow from one another.

But the modern person may ask, "If anything can be interpreted allegorically, how does one determine if an interpretation is valid?"

In the early church, every interpretation had to accord with the other Scriptures and with accepted church doctrine.² In addition to these rules, interpretations could be evaluated by Augustine's "rule of love." Because Jesus taught that all Scripture hangs on the two great commandments to love God and neighbour, Augustine said that any interpretation which does not tend toward the fulfilment of these two commandments should be rejected.³ As we will see in our study of the reception of Ephesians 2:11–22, for many interpreters the Christological realities in a passage ought to reflect themselves in lived practice. Both people and interpretations can be known by their fruits.

Early Christian Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22

Ephesians 2:11–22 is a text about violence. It is a text about blood, crucifixion, and demolition. It names animosity, hostility, separation, alienation and hopelessness. It asks its readers to recall these things, to face again realities of

¹ Arthur Holder, *Christian Spirituality: The Classics* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009). Accessed 23 September 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central.

² For an example, see Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Zechariah*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Baltimore Catholic University of America Press, 2005), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/abdn/detail.action?docID=3134797>.

³ St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, Book Three, XII–XIV.

shame, estrangement and strife in which they have been caught up because of group identities of various kinds.

But it is also a passage about peace. It is about the birth of a new humanity out of the blood of Israel's Messiah, who by his death killed animosity itself and put an end to separation, alienation and shame. The identity and unity of this Messiah was critical to early interpreters because in it they found hope for an entirely new social reality and life together in a restored world.

Combating Gnosticism and the Centrality of Christology

This, I believe, helps to explain why the earliest recorded uses of Ephesians 2:11–22 were to combat Gnosticism and preserve the unity of the church. Gnostics were Christians, or members of pseudo-Christian sects, who held to a variety of heretical beliefs lodged within alternative cosmologies. They often held an ambivalent view toward the material world, with many viewing creation as a mistake made in ignorance by an errant cosmic being who imprisoned souls in matter. The goal was thus to transcend earthly existence and return to the true, immaterial heaven. This can only happen if one overcomes the ignorance of material life through special knowledge or "gnosis". Within this cosmology, Jesus is understood as a spiritual being who came to give us the gnosis we need to make this escape.

In order for Jesus to be a fully "Gnostic" being, he cannot be imprisoned in the material world in the same way as ordinary humans, and so the idea of Jesus' suffering a physical death in an earthly body was absurd to many, something believed only in ignorance.⁴ Where orthodoxy says that Jesus is equally God and human, and that humankind is made in God's image, Gnosticism creates hierarchies in Jesus' being, in the order of the cosmos and ultimately among human beings.

Ephesians 2:11–22, with its insistence on Christ's breaking down the wall of hostility "in his flesh" (v. 14), became a useful passage for the orthodox in debates with Gnostics. Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155 – c. 240 AD) points out

⁴ "Gnosticism," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 6 October 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gnosticism/Diversity-of-Gnostic-myths>.

that "we find from this passage that there was in Christ a fleshly body, such as was able to endure the cross".⁵

Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 202 AD) likewise quotes our passage in *Against Heresies*. He points out that both Jews and Gentiles (including Gnostics!) are beholden to ignorant beliefs which the true gospel must correct, in order to bring unity. In fact, the validity of the true gospel is proved by the fact that it serves to correct and heal *all* peoples, and is given "without hypocrisy or respect of persons".⁶

Christological discussions were paramount for early Christian interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22. Early interpreters understood one's beliefs about Christ to determine one's views of God and other human beings. They believed that the implications of Christology were theological, social, and political, and saw that dividing the person of Christ also led to dividing the impact of the cross, dividing the church and dividing humanity.

Reconciliation for the Cosmos: The Impact of the Incarnation

Many of the early writers I surveyed understood the impact of the atonement to be personal, communal cosmic, and universal; only a God who took on every spiritual and material dimension could achieve it. The work of Jesus undoes every hostility, at every level of division. Sin, death and the reign of the Powers of the Air are all overcome at once in the cross, which tears down every barrier to unity and harmony in all of creation.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296 – 373 AD) explains the multi-faceted effects of the atonement in his seminal work *On the Incarnation*. He says that Christ became a man in a material body like ours in order to redeem not only human beings but all of creation. He evokes the image of the cross to interpret Ephesians 2:11–22, while also making reference to other passages in Ephesians:

Again, the death of the Lord is the ransom of all, and by it
"the middle wall of partition" is broken down and the call of
the Gentiles comes about. How could He have called us if He

⁵ Tertullian, "Church Fathers: Against Marcion, Book V (Tertullian)", *New Advent*, accessed 11 March 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/03125.htm>, ch. 17.

⁶ A.C. Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Printing Company, 1885), 418.

had not been crucified, for it is only on the cross that a man dies with arms outstretched? Here, again, we see the fitness of His death and of those outstretched arms: it was that He might draw His ancient people with the one and the Gentiles with the other, and join both together in Himself. Even so, He foretold the manner of His redeeming death, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself." Again, the air is the sphere of the devil, the enemy of our race who, having fallen from heaven, endeavors with the other evil spirits who shared in his disobedience both to keep souls from the truth and to hinder the progress of those who are trying to follow it. The apostle refers to this when he says, "According to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience." But the Lord came to overthrow the devil and to purify the air and to make "a way" for us up to heaven, as the apostle says, "through the veil, that is to say, His flesh." This had to be done through death, and by what other kind of death could it be done, save by a death in the air, that is, on the cross? Here, again, you see how right and natural it was that the Lord should suffer thus; for being thus "lifted up," He cleansed the air from all the evil influences of the enemy.

For Athanasius, the incarnation altered the very fabric of the universe. He says, "For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all."⁷ He further says that God worked "through man to reveal himself everywhere, as well as through the other parts of his creation, so that nothing was left void of his Divinity and knowledge ... even as the Divine Scripture says, "The whole universe was filled with the knowledge of the

⁷ St. Athanasius of Alexandria, "On the Incarnation," last modified 15 March 2021, <https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/15471/documents/2016/10/St.%20Athanasius-On%20the%20Incarnation.pdf>, 6.

Lord",⁸ and that "the Lord touched all parts of creation, and freed and undeceived them all from every deceit. As St. Paul says, 'Having put off from himself the principalities and the powers, he triumphed on the cross'".⁹

In his interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22, Irenaeus also argues for the all-encompassing impact of the Cross against Gnosticism in *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching*. As we have already seen, for Irenaeus part of the error in Gnosticism is that it creates hierarchies based on levels of access to divine knowledge, whereas the true gospel is given freely to all. Irenaeus says that God "announces the gathering together in peace and concord, through the name of Christ, of men of unlike races, and (yet) of like dispositions".¹⁰ Later, he says that those who were once enemies with each other will become friends and beloved on account of their faith in him as the reign of sin is ended and Christ conquers death by death.¹¹ Finally, he adds that when the prophecy says that Jesus "ascended on high and led captivity captive" (also quoted in Eph. 4:8–10), this signifies the undoing of the reign of apostate angels over humankind.

The Glory of God and How He Shares it with Us

So far we have seen how early Christian interpreters used our passage to combat Gnosticism, arguing for the full divinity and humanity of Christ, which is necessary for God to redeem every part of creation. God does this by restoring his image in us first, and then through us restoring all of creation. According to several interpreters, he does this through sharing his glory again with us in the Incarnation. For many early Christians, the only way that human beings will not fall prey to perpetrating acts of violence is if their original status and glory is restored – a glory derived from their Creator and his purpose, and found in peace, justice, righteousness and love. Because God associated himself

⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, "The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching," *Documenta Catholica Omnia – Multilanguage Catholic E-Book Database of All the Writings of Holy Popes, Councils, Church Fathers and Doctors, and Allied Auctors*, 59, last modified March 15, 2021, https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0130-0202,_Iraeneus,_Demonstration_Of_The_Apostolic_Preaching,_EN.pdf.

¹¹ Ibid., 63.

with every dimension of existence, he is able to share his own honour and glory with all of creation together, and bring restoration out of estrangement.

Before diving in to just a few of the many interpreters who take up this theme in connection to Ephesians 2:11–22, we will look at what contemporary research in sociology and psychology has to say about this very subject, the connection between violence and the loss of belonging (that I have a secure place in a community which loves me) and glory (I have not only a place, but also a purpose in who and what I am which is significant to others and recognised by them), otherwise known as "shame".

Contemporary Research on Connections between Shame and Violence

In recent years, the fields of sociology and psychology have shown increased interest in the connection between shame and violence. Challenging older theories of violence based on competition for resources (which some now characterise as capitalistic and Darwinian), several researchers now argue that violence can be better explained by competition for *respect* and *recognition*, rather than merely for resources.¹² Even apparent grabs for money or power often seem to serve the underlying cause of maintaining status, recognition and the sense of one's own individual or collective identity. To put it in other words, when people lack a sense of belonging and of glory, they will do almost anything to regain it. And when their sense of belonging and glory is threatened, they will do almost anything to try and protect it. To do so is to protect their very identity, their very selves. And when people cannot find any other means of saving or regaining their glory, they will almost inevitably turn to violence, against either themselves or others.

This connection has been argued from the level of individual violent offenders¹³ to that of the wars of nation states. One ready-to-hand example is the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany, a nation that had lost status and respect in the eyes of the world following the First World War. Hitler was able to exploit

¹² Roman Gerodimos, "Humiliation, Shame, and Violence: Honor, Trauma, and Political Extremism Before and After the 2009 Crisis in Greece", *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 22 October 2018, 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2018.1523558>.

¹³ James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

the collective shame of the German people, touting an ideology in which they were the greatest nation on earth, but had been undermined in their greatness by a Jewish conspiracy, among other things. Hitler promised to restore the status of Germany as a world power.¹⁴

If all of this holds true, then it is also significant that recent studies on shame in the United States find that although our culture is highly shame-based, shame is a topic which we often find difficult, if not impossible, to fully recognise and address.¹⁵ The individualism of the modern West – which arguably reaches its pinnacle in American culture – seems to have the side-effect of making it difficult for us to understand and address problems like shame, which are inherently communal in nature. In our culture, you should not care what other people think. We glorify standing out from the crowd, being a leader and an individual thinker. We tend to make individuals solely, or almost solely, responsible for their actions and place in life.¹⁶ And so, we often end up with a sense of shame about feeling shame in the first place, creating what can become a limitless cycle of shame.¹⁷

The insight of so many early Christians that the killing of hostility in Ephesians 2:11–22 is connected with glory could present a much-needed cultural corrective for Westerners who want to meaningfully address violence today, and especially for Christians. The early church can help us to see the ways that Scripture is addressing violence at its roots – roots which may often be hidden to us.

The Kingship of Jesus

Part of the reason why the kingship of Christ is so important to the early fathers is that this is one way in which God is at work to restore the image of his glory in the world. I grew up partly in Thailand, a country which retained many

¹⁴ Thomas Scheff, G. Reginald Daniel, and Joseph Sterphone, “Shame and a Theory of War and Violence”, *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 39 (March 2018), 109–15, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.02.006>.

¹⁵ Thomas Scheff, “The Ubiquity of Hidden Shame in Modernity”, *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 2 (2014), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1749975513507244>.

¹⁶ Margaret J. King, “Deep Culture”, *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 4 (2012): 687–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2012.00952.x>.

¹⁷ Scheff, “The Ubiquity of Hidden Shame in Modernity.”

traditional views of monarchy. H.M. King Bhumibol was understood to be a person not only of national significance, but even of spiritual and cosmic significance. He was universally revered, adored and venerated. Photos of him were displayed everywhere, and people would often stop to show their respect with the traditional *wai* gesture. Especially treasured was a photo of H.M. the King smiling as he stooped down to receive a flower from an old peasant woman who (the story went) had waited so long for him to pass that the flower had withered. Another favourite was a photo with sweat dripping down his face, showing his labour for the sake of the nation. Visitors to any one of his 77 palaces throughout the country (one for each province) would bow to the ground in the presence of his throne, because it was the seat of his rule. H.M. the King was called the Father of the country, and songs would tell of how his sweat became the rain to water the rice fields of the Kingdom, and how his great merit benefited the entire nation. The prosperity of Thailand was taken as proof of the King's righteousness and goodness over the many years of his long reign. He was held up as the ideal Thai, the prime exemplar of what it meant to have honour and glory in that nation.

In many ancient Near Eastern cultures, too, the glory of a king was displayed in the righteousness of his laws, the justice of his judgments, the defeat of his enemies and the peace and prosperity of his people.¹⁸ Early Christian exegetes appear to work within this understanding. Jesus the King will ultimately conquer all sin, death and evil Powers in putting all his enemies under his feet;¹⁹ but while we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, the citizens of his coming kingdom are to be a display of his glory, resembling their king-exemplar. We are to demonstrate the wisdom of his laws to the alternative Powers which have set up opposing standards for gaining glory and power. As Ephesians 3:10–11 says, “so that through the church the multi-coloured

¹⁸ Pamela Barmash, *The Laws of Hammurabi: At the Confluence of Royal and Scribal Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 49–50.

¹⁹ Irenaeus says that the "enemies" which Scripture says will be put under his feet are "those found in apostasy, angels and archangels and powers and thrones". St. Irenaeus of Lyons, "The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching", 65.

wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (my translation).²⁰

According to Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260 – c. 339 AD) the kingship of God over all is displayed through his goodness in calling every kind of people to himself.²¹ God shows the overabundance of his own glory through the giving away of glory, by reconciling all and granting all a place of dignity, belonging and identity within his kingdom. Didymus the Blind (c. 313 – 398) further says that the peaceful condition which Christ's mediation accomplishes among his subjects is what allows God's people to perceive his glory.²² Unless we are united in diversity, God's glory will not be accurately perceived by us or the world.

Gregory of Nyssa says that the unity Jesus prayed for in the High Priestly Prayer is held together by glory:

He who invested himself with humanity received this glory before the cosmos existed, and when that humanity had been glorified by the Spirit, the further gift of the Spirit's glory was passed on to the entire heredity [of that humanity], beginning with the disciples. That is why he said, “The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.” Therefore the person who has ... come to share the status of kingship and by impassibility and purity has become a recipient of the Spirit's glory...²³

For Gregory, the glory of God is not only given to God and enjoyed (as in the Westminster Catechism), but also something that God must *give to us* in

²⁰ See also Eph. 6:10–12 and Col. 2:15.

²¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, “Eusebius of Caesarea: Praeparatio Evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel), Book 1,” trans. E.H. Gifford (The Tertullian Project, 1903), http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_01_book1.htm.

²² Hill and Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Zechariah*, 278–279.

²³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, trans. Richard A. Norris Jr., vol. 13, Writings from the Greco-Roman World (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 495–497.

Christ. When we are united according to God's standards for belonging, we *are* his glory in the earth, and share in Christ's status of kingship. The church is collectively given a stake in God's display of his own reputation and honour as our King.

For Gregory and for many of the early fathers, Christ came to impart his own inherently communal Trinitarian peace and glory, which is manifested in social realities and held together in us as we are built around Christ, the Cornerstone. Because Christ killed the old standards for glory competition through suffering the death they brought, his people can take on a totally new standard, a new social reality which Ignatius says he inaugurated in his death.²⁴ Now we no longer fight and kill for our own glory's sake and for our own identities; rather, we share glory with God himself through Christ the King. Returning to old means of belonging, identity and glory will prove disastrous.

When we come under the rule of Christ, our diversity is no longer allowed to divide us or to become the basis for oppressively creating ranks of worth, dignity or belonging. One might say that the identities we have "in the world" become reframed and relativised within a "family of families"²⁵ which is redefined with what Jerome Neyrey calls "a new index of honor".²⁶

However, in the works we surveyed this does not seem to mean that we enter the church and become culturally, ethnically, racially or in other ways homogenous. It does not necessarily mean the erasure of our other group identities or distinctions.²⁷ In fact, for some the glory of God is found precisely in the diversity which is displayed in unity within the church.

²⁴ St. Ignatius of Antioch, "Church Fathers: Epistle to the Smyrnaeans (St. Ignatius)," New Advent, accessed 15 March 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0109.htm>.

²⁵ Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World*, 2015, 150.

²⁶ As cited by Mischke in *The Global Gospel*, 152.

²⁷ There is extensive scholarly discussion around how ethnicity was viewed in the Greco-Roman world, and especially in early Christendom, which often made use of ethnic language in describing Christian identity. For more thorough understanding of this topic, see: Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Terence L. Donaldson, *Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine: The Nations, the Parting of the Ways, and Roman Imperial Ideology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020).

Glory Increased and Unity Strengthened by Diversity

John Chrysostom (c. 347 – 407 AD) provides one example of an early writer who dealt with the issue of unity in diversity. Like many of the other writers, Chrysostom sees conflict in the church as a neglect of the truth of Ephesians 2:11–22. He goes on to say that because Christ has brought us near who were far off, we also ought to draw near to others. Christ "united persons so widely separated", so why is it that natural differences are allowed to create disunity within the church?²⁸

Chrysostom says that natural distinctions – when understood within a body – are actually the very things which enable unity and the greater glory and belonging of all. It is "the wonder and peculiar excellency of the body, when the things which are many and diverse make one". If everyone were a hand, there would be no body; rather, the unity of the body is attained through diversity, because wrist connects to hand, and elbow to wrist and so on. Indeed, the things which make us think we are unequal in honour are the very things which make us all equal.

But this equality is not derived from measuring the gifts, abilities or dignity that individual persons possess against some external standard for worth; instead it is derived from the common belonging of each individual in the body, and the ability to belong in the body comes precisely from difference. This is why Paul says, "If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor. 12:19), because "if there were not great diversity among you, you could not be a body; and without being a body, you could not be one; and without being one, you could not be equal in honour".²⁹

For Chrysostom, this diversity extends also to social class. A church which does not have people from backgrounds of poverty in its midst, and that fails to show honour across social classes cannot consider itself complete. "Even [those who beg] fulfil a most important office in the Church, clinging to the doors of the sanctuary and supplying one of its greatest ornaments: and without these there could be no perfecting the fullness of the Church."³⁰ When we

²⁸ St. John Chrysostom, 378.

²⁹ Ibid., 375–376.

³⁰ Ibid., 377.

accept standards outside of Christ (i.e., money, social standing, abilities etc.) for determining the worth and value of others, and allow them to be dishonoured, we fail to fully be the church. In fact, we do dishonour to ourselves, "so that he who wars with his brother wars with himself: for the injury done reaches not only to that one".³¹

It should also be noted that Chrysostom's insistence on the inclusion of the poor in the church did not mean that he thought poverty to be a "natural distinction" or that the poor should remain in need while others had more than enough. To the contrary, Chrysostom made forceful statements against any who enjoyed luxury while others suffered want, even saying that failure to share one's goods with the poor is equal to robbery,³² and that such people would "pay the harshest penalty" as those who squandered God's property.³³

For Chrysostom, the way Jesus draws near to those who are far off is how we are to draw near to those who are far off from us, including those of different social classes. The things which distinguish us are actually the things which ought to unite us more closely and which give us true equality as members of one body, compelling us to care for one another as for ourselves.

When We Fall Short of the Glory of Our King

Gregory of Nazianzus is one early interpreter who spoke extensively on peace. While his father was bishop of Nazianzus, a dispute arose between him and some of the local monastic community. This threatened to divide the church until it was finally resolved around the year 364. It was likely at this time that Gregory (himself a monk) delivered *The First Oration on Peace*.

Without mincing words, Nazianzus says,

We tore apart Christ, we who love God and Christ so well, and deceived one another in the name of truth, and in the name of love fostered hatred... in the name of peace we warred more than honor allowed, and in the name of him who was raised on the cross we were brought low, and in

³¹ Ibid., 377.

³² St. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), 49.

³³ Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, 50.

the name of him who was buried and resurrected we embraced death.³⁴

Later he says, "Who will utter the mighty doings of the Lord? Who will declare to all ears the praise that all share? Because both have become one and the dividing wall of hostility has been broken down; because you kept us from being a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples."³⁵

For Nazianzus, nothing was more reflective of God's glory than peace. Likewise, little was more dishonourable and shameful than disunity in the church, because it undoes the work of Christ and mars his image and glory in us.

This is why, according to Gregory, disunity within the church is "impiety toward the Trinity", because it fails to resemble the harmony of its communal God. It is "the Church stripped of her beauty, her ancient dignity destroyed".³⁶ I knew a man in Thailand who was in prison for murder and received the gift of the King's royal pardon. Having been honoured by such a precious gift, he set out to live a life worthy of it. We likewise, when we have been restored to humanity's former glory from such a great fall, ought to live a life worthy of the calling we have received (Eph. 3:1). Failure to do so not only degrades us, but dishonours the one who gave us the gift.

Gregory goes on to describe the continuous, fervent prayers of Christ for our unity, the unity he died to attain.

In this knowledge, my brothers, let us clasp one another; let us embrace; let us truly become one; let us imitate him who broke down the dividing wall of hostility and by his blood united and reconciled all things; let us say to this father we have in common, the gray head that we revere, our kind and gentle shepherd, Do you see the fruit of forbearance? Lift up your eyes round about, and see your children gathered,

³⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations*, trans. Martha Vinson (Baltimore, UNITED STATES: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/abdn/detail.action?docID=3134806>, 5.

³⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

just as you have fervently been wishing and the only thing you have been praying night and day to gain, that you might end the sojourn of your life in happy old age. Behold, all have come to you and nestle under your wings. They who left in tears now come forward eagerly in gladness and stand round their altar. Come, hail and rejoice, best and most devoted of fathers, because you are vested and arrayed in them all, like a bride in her finery.³⁷

For Nazianzus, the unity of God's children in imitation of Christ is the adornment of glory for God himself. When we allow ourselves to be in conflict, we dishonour God and break his fatherly heart.³⁸

Nazianzus says that the primary names of Jesus in Scripture are "Love" (from 1 John 4:16) and "Peace" (from our passage in Ephesians). "Why in the world, then, do we, the disciples of love, hate one another so? Why do we, the disciples of peace, engage in wars which do not admit of treaty or truce? Why are we, the disciples of the chief corner stone, detached from one another?"³⁹

This "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" whereby we love God and neighbour is the sum and substance of the Law and Prophets:

As the disciples of Christ, who for our sake emptied himself to the point of adopting a servant's form and has gathered to himself those alienated from the blessings of heaven, how could we not reach out and embrace one another and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, which is the hidden meaning, the sum and substance, if you will, of the Law and the Prophets?⁴⁰

For Nazianzus, peace and unity are not only ideals to strive for if possible, but are inseparable from Christ, for he is our peace. Nazianzus also extends

³⁷ Ibid., 19.

³⁸ Ibid., 118–119.

³⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 143.

this peace beyond the individual, and even beyond the church, to include all of one's neighbours:

How absurd it is to hold that harmony constitutes the greatest good in private life but does not serve the public interest in like degree... It is also absurd that each and every person strives for inner peace ... but does not show himself the same to others, believing instead that his neighbour's ruination is his own renown... It is equally absurd to know that the blessedness reserved for the peacemakers is so great that they alone of the ranks of the saved are called the sons of God, while we, on the other hand, relish hostility and then imagine that we are actually doing things dear to God, him who suffered for our sake that he might reconcile us to himself and dissolve the war in our hearts!⁴¹

And yet, despite these rousing speeches on the bond of peace, we know that Nazianzus tolerated slavery, as did nearly all of his contemporaries. Although he admitted that the social divide between slaves and masters was a "sinful distinction" and not part of God's created intentions, it was one with which he was willing to settle.⁴² It was one area where he did not expect the life of the church to conform to its beliefs on the nature of God.

By contrast, his close friend Gregory of Nyssa would be one of the only people of his day to oppose slavery unilaterally.

Gregory of Nyssa and a Christology of Shared Glory

As we seek to gain wisdom for our own times, we ought to ask how someone like Nyssa became such a staunch upholder of the dignity of all human beings, willing to go against his society, his brother and his closest friends. What did he see that nearly all of his contemporaries failed to see (or at least failed to live by)?

⁴¹ Ibid., 128–129.

⁴² J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195152791.001.0001>.

Our study on early reception of Ephesians 2:11–22 with a particular view to issues of honour, shame and glory advances the argument that all of these issues are fundamentally Christological. Our view of humanity is always reflective of our view of Christ.

Commenting on Ephesians 2, Nyssa says,

Recognizing Christ as “peace” we shall exhibit the true title of Christian in ourselves through the peace in our life. For the One “has slain enmity” as the apostle says... if we have Christ, who is peace, let us also deaden hatred in ourselves in order to achieve in our life what we believe is in Him. For that One has broken down the intervening wall of the enclosure and, out of the two elements in Himself, has created one new man and made peace.”⁴³

Nyssa is insistent that our lives align with what we believe about Christ. If not, we are attempting to resurrect what God has already “killed for our salvation”.

But peace was not cheap for Nyssa, nor was it simply the absence of conflict. True peace could only be realised by also killing the hostility within ourselves, which leads to greater peace for all within our sphere of influence.⁴⁴ Just as the incarnation impacts all of humanity, so our own personal transformation in the resurrection leads to love for virtue *and* social transformation,⁴⁵ revealing that our claim to the name of Christ is true and authentic.

Slaveholding, within such an understanding, is inherently sinful. As J. Kameron Carter quotes Gregory:

It is the very expression and “feeling of Pride” inasmuch as [the slaveholder] “turns the property of God into his own property and arrogates dominion to his own kind, so as to think himself the owner of men and women.” What does

⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Ascetical Works (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 58)*, trans. Virginia Woods Callahan (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 103.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Ascetical Works*, 103.

⁴⁵ Carter, 244.

this do, asks Gregory, but lead the one who would be master “[to overstep] his own nature through pride, regarding himself as something different from his subordinates”?⁴⁶

For Nyssa, slaveholding is contrary to nature as established by God, and thus an affront to God's honour, and his rightful place as Creator and King. He says,

You condemn man to slavery, when his nature is free and is self-determining, and you legislate in competition with God, overturning his law for the human species. The one made on the specific terms that he should be the owner of the earth, and appointed to government by the Creator – him you bring under the yoke of slavery, as though defying and fighting against the divine decree.⁴⁷

He goes on:

Why do you go beyond what is subject to you and raise yourself up against the very species which is free, counting your own kind on a level with four-footed things and even footless things? “You have subjected all things” to man, declares the word through the prophecy, and in that text it lists the things subject, “cattle” and “oxen” and “sheep.” Surely human beings have not been produced from your cattle? Surely cows have not conceived human stock? Irrational beasts are the only slaves of humankind... But by dividing the human species in two with “slavery” and “ownership” you have caused it to be enslaved to itself, and to be the owner of itself.⁴⁸

Gregory sees the glory of humankind, the church, and God himself as intertwined realities which are fundamentally social. When we degrade or

⁴⁶ Ibid., 236.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 237.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 238.

devalue other human beings, we become our own tyrants, dishonouring our humanity.

He continues,

For what price, tell me? What did you find in existence worth as much as the human nature? What price did you put on the rationality? How many obols did you reckon the equivalent of the likeness of God? How many staters did you get for selling the being shaped by God? "God said, let us make man in our own image and likeness." If he is in the likeness of God, and rules the whole earth, and has been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller?

[To God alone belongs this power;] or rather, not even to God himself. For "his gracious gifts," it says, "are irrevocable". God would not therefore reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, spontaneously recalled us to freedom. But if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God's?

Our posture towards other human beings is a display of our posture towards God. As Gregory says, "Whenever a human being is for sale, therefore, nothing less than the owner of the earth is led into the sale-room."⁴⁹

God in flesh both reveals and determines the worth of the human being. Because humanity is of the highest worth in all of creation, only a being of equal worth could enslave them ("you have caused [the human species] to be enslaved to itself"), and only a being of *infinite* worth could free them from that enslavement ("he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, spontaneously recalled us to freedom").

Jesus' ability to redeem is proved in his resurrection, where his glory and Godhead is revealed, and thus also the glory of the humanity which he took on. And so in his Easter sermon Gregory says:

⁴⁹ Ibid., 239.

Now is the prisoner freed, the debtor forgiven, the slave is liberated by the good and kindly proclamation of the church, not being rudely struck on the cheek and released from beatings with a beating, nor being exhibited to the mob on a stand as though it were a show, getting insult and indignity as the beginning of his freedom, but released and acknowledged with equal decency...

You masters have heard; mark my saying as a sound one; do not slander me to your slaves as praising the day with false rhetoric, take away the pain from oppressed souls as the Lord does the deadness from bodies, transform their disgrace into honour, their oppression into joy, their fear of speaking into openness; bring out the prostrate from their corner as if from their graves, let the beauty of the [Easter] feast blossom like a flower upon everyone.⁵⁰

Notice how Gregory appeals to honour and glory in his attempts to persuade masters to free their slaves. He points out that their own honour is at stake, but more than that, *the reputation and glory of the resurrection itself is at stake*. If slaves do not experience freedom and debts are not forgiven, then the Easter message itself appears to be false rhetoric, merely a show deprived of real power.

For Gregory, this is why slavery is so abhorrent. God restored his glory to humanity through suffering the violence of our own attempts at glory; to subjugate other human beings through slavery and violence defaces that glory again. The glory that God gave to Christ has been given to the church, and the person and work of Christ is now the only way to define what our communities ought to look like. While we may never manifest the Trinitarian unity perfectly in the church, Gregory believes that we are to be constantly moving further into that perfection; indeed, this movement will continue for all eternity in the resurrected life.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., 244.

⁵¹ Ibid., 248.

Where the church manifests these things, we display God's glory and kingship to the world, and we put the alternative kingdoms of oppression to shame; but, where we fall back from the grace God has given us in Christ, it is as if we have divided Christ again and forsaken the place of honour he won for us.

Conclusions from Early Christian Interpretation

We have discovered through our survey of early Christian interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22 that the early church understood peace to be intertwined with glory, a glory which our Creator must restore in us. They also understood interpretation and theology to be both Christological and practical, such that one's Christology ought to have a direct impact on real life and on the way that believers together shape their common life. For the early Christians, the new humanity was not an individual matter but a collective one. To this, I will add one brief exegetical note.

English translations can easily obscure how prominent the *collective* new humanity is in the book of Ephesians, and indeed in all of the Pauline literature. The first semantic disconnect is in the English "you". Whereas in Greek plural and singular second-person pronouns are distinguished, in modern English "you" can address either a group or an individual. Until a scholarly translation of Ephesians for the dialects of the US South is produced, the distinction between "you" and "all y'all" is always at risk of being missed. Since we already live in an individualistic culture, it will be easy for many of us to read the "you" addressed in the Pauline letters as "me" rather than "us".

And then, more particular to our case, there is the matter of the *anthropon* (ἄνθρωπον) and its use in Ephesians. In nearly every English translation, the word is translated as new "man" or "humanity" in 2:15, but the same word is translated as "self" in 4:22 and 24 (reading something like "put off the old self/put on the new self"). This choice makes it impossible to catch the explicit connection being drawn in chapters 2 and 4 without consulting the Greek. It also causes us to think of 2:11–22 in more collective terms but to think of what follows in chapters 4, 5 and 6 in individualistic terms. The very word "self" almost always means "individual"; the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as

"a person's or thing's individuality or essence".⁵² So the task of "putting off the old *self*" and "putting on the new *self*" can be divorced from the theological statements of chapter 2. A corporate theological reality becomes an individualistic task. Now the call for "all y'all" to put on the new humanity as described in chapter 2 becomes a call for *you* to put on the new self, and presumably to do so by yourself.

Thus a critical insight which early Christian interpreters would not have missed, particularly those who read the Greek New Testament in their native language, is lost: that we cannot put on the new humanity alone but must do so alongside others. This is why Gregory of Nyssa found slavery incompatible with orthodox Christology, and why Chrysostom saw the inclusion of the poor in the church as "necessary" and not as a nice option for those who feel a special call to it. We need a sense of belonging and glory, and we cannot gain those things apart from others.

How do these insights apply to the individualistic cultures of the modern West, especially given the way that we struggle to name and address shame?

Questions and Conclusions for American Christianity

We see from Scripture and from early interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22 that peace comes about through the restoration of humankind to its glory in the Creator. In the incarnation, Jesus comes to restore the glory of God in humankind, which it had tragically lost. This glory is not shared primarily with atomised individuals but with a community. It is manifested in us when we live at peace with one another and so come to resemble "Christ our Peace". The social sciences add to our understanding of the connection between peace and glory by showing how toxic shame lies at the roots of violence of all kinds: against oneself, against others and between groups.

The need for glory can thus be seen as a fundamental human need. It is the need to know that we have a community where we belong, that within that community we are seen and loved for who we are and that we have a purpose

⁵² "self, pron., adj., n., and adv.". OED Online. September 2022. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175090?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=Z3z5rs&> (accessed 19 September 2022).

in the world which is meaningful to others. To have a sense of our glory is to know who we are, to know whose we are and to be recognised and dignified in our unique giftings for the world. And when people experience a lack or loss of glory (shame) through social bonds that have become broken or toxic, they will do almost anything to regain it, or at least to regain a similitude of it.

When we take these insights to the current social landscape of the United States, we can see a society ridden with toxic shame and its effects in violence and the rhetoric of violence. In the US, overdose deaths have nearly doubled in the last ten years,⁵³ deaths of despair in general have increased by 100% since 2000,⁵⁴ school shootings are on the rise⁵⁵ and political and ideological divisions seem more deeply entrenched than ever, just to name a few examples.

One great example of how issues of shame play out in political divisions and violence was the January 6th Insurrection at the US Capitol.

The January 6th Insurrection at the US Capitol

On January 6th of 2021, a shocking series of events unfolded at the US Capitol, where we saw violence, insurrection and terror disturbingly intertwined with politics and Christian faith. Subsequent research has shown that what the individuals who stormed the Capitol on that day shared in common was not coming from communities who voted for Trump. Nor were other demographic indicators like rural versus urban or socioeconomics a uniting factor.

In fact, these individuals were actually *less* likely to come from rural counties or counties where Trump had won. "Only one meaningful correlation emerged. Other things being equal, insurgents were much more likely to come from a county where the white share of the population was in decline...This was a strong link, and it held up in every state." In other words, these were people who were more likely to feel a sense of threat from the racial or cultural "other".

⁵³ Center for Disease Control, "Drug Overdose Deaths Remain High", 2 June, 2022, [https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/index.html#:~:text=Drug%20Overdose%20Deaths%20Remain%20High&text=In%202020%2C%2091%2C799%20drug%20overdose,2020%20\(28.3%20per%20100%2C000\).](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/index.html#:~:text=Drug%20Overdose%20Deaths%20Remain%20High&text=In%202020%2C%2091%2C799%20drug%20overdose,2020%20(28.3%20per%20100%2C000).),

⁵⁴ Social Capital Project, "Long-Term Trends in Deaths of Despair", Social Capital Project (Washington D.C.: Joint Economic Committee - Republicans, September 2019).

⁵⁵ "Shooting Incidents at K-12 Schools (Jan 1970–Jun 2022)", Center for Homeland Defense and Security: Naval Postgraduate School, June 2022, <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/charts-graphs/>.

This suggests – especially in light of research indicating connections between shame and violence – is that the violence which took place at the Capitol on that day cannot be attributed merely to ideas. Psychologically, ideas like "we must storm the Capitol to take back this election" are only a manifestation of much deeper issues of shame and status games, issues that American society struggles even to name, let alone to adequately discuss and address.⁵⁶

And these individuals no longer represent only a fringe; in fact, support for them has grown. According to polls conducted in June 2021, "just over 8 percent [of Americans] agreed that Biden was illegitimate and that violence was justified to restore Trump to the White House. That corresponds to 21 million American adults." The same article also mentions an unrelated Public Religion Research Institute survey completed in November of the same year which found that 12 percent of Americans believed that the election was stolen and that "true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country". Given these alarming statistics, it may be no wonder that the article compared the America of today with Northern Ireland before the formation of the IRA.⁵⁷

How are we to be people of peace in the midst of times like these?

What We Can Learn

Firstly, we can look for the deeper causes of division, strife and violence in our families, among our friends, and in all of our communities. Realising that so much of the violence we see around us has toxic shame at its root helps us to be more compassionate towards our own political or ideological "others", whomever they may be. It helps us to understand that we cannot merely fight for peace on the plane of ideas and argument, nor merely on the plane of political power (though all of these may be necessary). Toxic shame makes people vulnerable to violent ideas, ideologies and actions in the first place, as ways to deal with deeper issues of identity and purpose. We will not be able to

⁵⁶ Scheff, "The Ubiquity of Hidden Shame in Modernity", 132

⁵⁷ Barton Gellman, "January 6th Was Practice," *The Atlantic*, December 6, 2021,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/01/january-6-insurrection-trump-coup-2024-election/620843/>.

uproot ideas without addressing the larger social brokenness underpinning them.

Likewise, the types of political change that we seek must keep the social dynamics of shame and the desire for glory in mind. As Peter Maurin used to say, the critical task is “to make that kind of society where it is easier for men to be good.”⁵⁸ How do we root and ground people in loving and whole communities which will give them the resources they need to withstand destructive ideologies and temptations to violence in our culture?

Maybe understanding our shared human need for belonging and glory will make us gentler with those we disagree with, and even with those who seem to threaten our own way of life, identity or dearly cherished beliefs. Perhaps it will cause us to re-evaluate our own convictions and the ways that we engage controversial issues. We may be fully convinced that we are “right”, but keeping shame dynamics in mind can help us remember that being right is not always the most important thing.

For the theologian and the church leader, our task is to help tell the stories which ground a community in its identity and purpose. Christian faith remains a massive political and cultural force in the US, and those of us who claim places of influence within it have an urgent responsibility to cast theological visions and tell the biblical stories which can undo the power of shame at its very roots. It is our task to preach good news of peace, not only to those who are “near” us in terms of politics, religion, culture, or socioeconomic status, but also to those who are far off – even to our enemies. We must stand in the gap, stretching out our arms like the King we serve to take the hand of each side and bring them together in him. We must teach people to glory not in worldly power, nor in a particular way of life, nor in any ideology, but in the new humanity where the identities we have “in flesh” are now remade in Christ.

And we ourselves – through the lives of our congregations and Christian communities – can be a display of the unity and glory of our God to the world around us. We can work for recreated communities where people can experience the glory and goodness of our King as a tangible lived reality, and

⁵⁸ Dorothy Day, “Peter’s Program,” *The Catholic Worker*, May 1955, <https://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/articles/176.html>.

not merely as a theory. We can live the story of the good news of peace which Jesus brought about through the cross and so truly reflect the glory of our Peace.

We can reach across the ecclesial divides of denomination, race, socioeconomic status and politics to love one another earnestly, in action and not just in word. In one small town I know in Washington state, the town's four churches – Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic – have done this by celebrating joint worship in the park during the summer, and by creating a shared deacon board to address the needs of the entire community. While they are separate denominationally and disagree theologically, they can work together in the practice of "true religion" by caring for the vulnerable.

As we find our glory in Christ, we will see that our own sense of purpose and call is only increased by diversity, and begin to feel our need for one another's gifts. We can hope that this will make us more eager to seek relationships with churches of different ethnicity or socioeconomic status in our areas. And if we happen to be the church or leader with greater status, we ought to take the initiative to cross divides so that we may "outdo one another in showing honour". I have seen this happen in one diversifying neighbourhood in California where a historically white church decided to begin sharing their building with different ethnic congregations. This church recognised that their neighbourhood was changing and had the humility to make big adjustments in order to continue furthering the kingdom in their area. When I was there, Sundays hosted five congregations: Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese, majority black and majority white, and they met to share fellowship at quarterly bring-and-share meals (with pretty incredible food!). In these ways, they are not only able to maintain a building which none of them could afford on their own, but they also become aware of one another's needs and work together to create a safer and more whole community for all. And of course, the community gets to see people with very different styles of worship, languages and ethnic backgrounds loving and serving one another as children of one Father.

And finally, if we make an honest evaluation of our communities and see that we are not living up to this reality, then we can allow ourselves to feel some

healthy shame, the kind that leads to transformation and healing. Rather than attempting to cover up or excuse our shortcomings, we can look at them squarely. The reason we can do this is because the good news of peace in Ephesians presents us with hope. As I have heard it said, "What the Holy Spirit reveals, the Holy Spirit heals." Healthy shame does not demand that the exposure of painful truth means we give up on ourselves or others. Rather, it presents an invitation from the Spirit to join our God in seeing more of the new humanity – which is really Christ himself – in our midst.

The reality is that we all live in a world broken by evil and riddled with shame. We have all suffered from it, and we have all contributed to it. But this is not who we were made to be. We were made to be a glorious community of justice and unity, where the power of sin and shame is undone, where people are holistically liberated by the resurrection, and where each one has enough of what they need to live a life of dignity, with the glory and belonging for which they each were made. And because this is what we were made for, with the help of the creating Spirit at work in Scripture and in each other, this is what we can be again.

Sources

- Barmash, Pamela. *The Laws of Hammurabi: At the Confluence of Royal and Scribal Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Bernardi, Gabriella. "Hypatia of Alexandria (355 or 370 ca. to 415)." In *The Unforgotten Sisters: Female Astronomers and Scientists before Caroline Herschel*, edited by Gabriella Bernardi, 27–36. New York: Springer International Publishing, 2016.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-26127-0_5.
- Buell, Denise Kimber. *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Carter, J. Kameron. *Race: A Theological Account*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195152791.001.0001>.
- Chadwick, Henry. "Marcion." In *The Church in Ancient Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199246955.003.0012>.
- Donaldson, Terence L. *Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine: The Nations, the Parting of the Ways, and Roman Imperial Ideology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020.
- Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland. *For God and His Glory Alone: A Contribution Relating Some Biblical Principles to the Situation in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: ECONI, 1998.
<https://www.contemporarychristianity.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/fgandhga.pdf>.
- Gellman, Barton. "January 6th Was Practice." *The Atlantic*, December 6, 2021.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/01/january-6-insurrection-trump-coup-2024-election/620843/>.
- Gilligan, James. *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Gerodimos, Roman. "Humiliation, Shame, and Violence: Honor, Trauma, and Political Extremism Before and After the 2009 Crisis in Greece." *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, October 22, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2018.1523558>.
- "Gnosticism," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed October 6, 2021,
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gnosticism/Diversity-of-Gnostic-myths>.
- Holder, Arthur. *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009. Accessed September 23, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- King, Margaret. "Deep Culture." *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 4 (2012).
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2012.00952.x>.
- Mischke, Werner. *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World*, 2015.
- Scheff, Thomas. "The Ubiquity of Hidden Shame in Modernity." *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 2 (2014). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1749975513507244>.
- Scheff, Thomas. Reginald, Daniel D. Sterphone, JosEphesians "Shame and a Theory of War and Violence." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 39 (March 2018): 109–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.02.006>.
- Smietana, Bob. "Sunday Morning in America Still Segregated - and That's OK With Worshipers." *Lifeway Research*, January 15, 2015.
<https://lifewayresearch.com/2015/01/15/sunday-morning-in-america-still-segregated-and-thats-ok-with-worshippers/>.